

# Spreading pathogens via healthcare uniforms

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It is relatively common to see healthcare employees in their uniforms (lab coats, scrubs, etc.) outside of the workplace in areas such as restaurants and grocery stores. Research has shown that microorganisms can be transmitted to employees' clothing when caring for patients, resulting in concern that pathogens on the uniforms may then be spread to other individuals. The purpose of this study was to investigate the practices and perceptions of physician assistant (PA) students and practicing PAs in Kansas regarding the manner of wearing medical uniforms outside the clinical setting. Methods: A survey was developed and distributed via email to PA students enrolled in the PA program at Wichita State as well as PA members of the Kansas Academy of Physician Assistants. Results: A total of 164 PA students and practicing PAs completed the survey. A majority of respondents (82%) admitted to wearing work attire in public after seeing a patient, and 74% of respondents said that their workplace did not have guidelines regarding uniforms worn outside the workplace. A majority (88%) agree that there is a potential risk of spreading pathogens from their clothing to healthy individuals. A majority (78%) also believe that education should be offered to healthcare employees regarding this topic. Conclusion: A majority of student and practicing PAs wear their uniforms outside the clinical setting. Professional organizations should consider the development of educational programs to increase awareness of the possibility of disease transmission from clothing worn in the clinical setting.